

Dickens and Childhood: A More Positive View (3)

Jacqueline Banerjee

要約

Dickens と子供：より積極的な見方

3. 後期小説

Jacqueline Banerjee

Bleak House (1853-4) における Jo の死は、*Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5) の Johnnie の死と同様、ヴィクトリア朝社会の冷酷と偽善に対する告発となっている。もっとも、Dickens の後期小説に登場する大部分の子供たちは驚くほど逆境に強いのである。苦しみに満ち満ちた世界、初期小説にみられた保護者や味方たちがいなくなってしまった世界で生きのびるためには強くなければならなかったのである。

批評家たちはしばしば、*Hard Times* (1854) の Louisa Gradgrind のように、幸せな子供時代を奪われたものや、*Little Dorrit* (1855-7) の Amy Dorrit のように、あまりにも早く大人の責任を負わされたものに焦点を合わせる。しかし一層重要なのは、成長を拒否する人物に対する Dickens の厳しい態度であろう。*Bleak House* の弱々しい Harold Skimpole や *Great Expectations* (1860-1) の Pip など、自らの弱さの責任を取らなければならない人物には事欠かない。若者は自分自身と他人に対して責任を負うことを学ぶべきなのだと Dickens は言っている。

彼の作品に登場する強い子供たちは、作家自身がその人格にあった溝を埋めることに成功したことを反映している。それは、靴墨工場に働きに出され生活に苦しんだ少年 Dickens と、精力的で決然とし大成功を収めた作家 Dickens との間の溝であった。彼らはまた Dickens のロマンティックな本性とヴィクトリア朝のリアリズムの調停役も果たしている。彼のリアリズムは若者の性といった重要な問題を回避してはいるが、Dickens はその時代の産み落した子であったという以上のものである。子供たちの苦しみに我々の関心を向けるばかりでなく、(より重要なことであるが) 彼らのすばらしい可能性を示すことによって、Dickens は彼の社会の、権利を奪われ重荷を背負わされているものたちの地位を高めたのである。

3. The Later Novels

In the darker novels of the fifties, one important child character again figures as a passive victim. This is Jo, the young crossing-sweeper in *Bleak House* (1853–4). The difference is that for all his complete and utter innocence, Jo is no Wordsworthian sprite (like Nell), nor a child later found to be of gentle birth (like Oliver and Smike), but one of the swarming untouchables of the back alleys. “[V]ery muddy, very hoarse, very ragged,”¹ he is compared to the blinded, terrified oxen goaded into place in the market, or the “thoroughly vagabond dog” (275) outside a butcher’s shop. The Dickens of that “tract for the times,”² his second Christmas book, *The Chimes*, speaks through Jo. Moreover, Jo’s misery cannot be blamed on one evil man, like Quilp, or on one form of legalized neglect, like the Poor Laws, or even on one particular brand of inhumanity, such as Mr Dombey’s single-minded concern for “the House.” Dickens’s attacks on his age up to this point have been quite specific; in *David Copperfield* they were only sporadic—on the Murdstones’ distorted religion, on Mr Creakle’s severity, on the inhuman condemnation of fallen women, and so on. But Jo is a casualty of the whole heartless society, operating on principles which take no account of individual needs, through the blind machinery of big institutions. “My instructions are, that you are to move on. I have told you so five hundred times,” says the constable who has taken Jo into custody for vagrancy. “‘But where?’ cries the boy. . . . ‘My instructions don’t go to that,’ replies the constable” (320). A burst of exasperation from the author, about the sloth of Parliamentary reform, is provoked by this exchange. Later, Dickens takes all his contemporaries to task for the death of this and other such homeless children.

Jo has hardly more power than the brickmaker’s “poor little gasping baby” (156) whose death precedes his in the novel—with the important exception that with the disease he eventually contracts, he infects those above him. Here Dickens makes a desperate appeal to the *self*-interest of his readers.

Other children’s deaths are recorded in this novel, and in the ones that follow. The drunken brickmaker alone boasts of having lost five previous infants. Children like Jo die by the disregarded dozen in derelict places like Tom-all-Alone’s; Rachel’s little sister in *Hard Times* (1854), another novel which shows Dickens’s deep concern with the welfare of the working classes (particularly for their better housing), had died “young and misshapen, awlung o’ sickly air as had’n no need to be, and awlung o’ working people’s miserable homes.”³ Much higher up the social scale there is the sentimentally pious death of Lucie Darnay’s son in *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which the appearance and words of the child recall Arthur in his dangerous illness, in the quite recently published *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*.

But the children of the poor, even the poorest of the poor, can be remarkably resilient. Guster, the Snagsbys’ maid in *Bleak House*, has survived the rigours of the notorious Tooting baby farm, and is now in her twenties. Her legacy of epileptic fits seems to add to, rather than detract from, her energy, and when Jo is brought to the house she has the

unique experience of being able to do a kindness to one still more low-placed than herself. Charley Neckett in the same novel goes out to do washing when she can barely reach the tub; her five- or six-year-old brother tends their infant sister during her absence. Amy Dorrit, born in the Marshalsea debtors' prison (where Dickens's father served his term), has assumed the responsibility of her older brother and sister from a similarly early age, earning a similar few shillings a week from her sewing.

The stamina of such children is amazing. In *Little Dorrit* (1855–7), Arthur pictures Amy for us, as a “youthful figure with tender feet going almost bare on the damp ground, with spare hands ever working, with its slight shape but half protected from the sharp weather.”⁴ There is all the life here that is entirely absent, now, from someone like the indolent, bored Lady Dedlock (who recalls, though only in these ways, Jane Austen's Lady Bertram). In the cases of Charley and Amy, the source of this life is *love*, not divine love which might pluck a child out of this suffering world, but “love *in* the world” (*Hard Times*, 308; emphasis added).

Dickens is at his most Blakean in opposing to the mechanical grinding of the wheels of society the simple child with his or her intuitively right responses. Esther Summerson of *Bleak House* and Sissy Jupe of *Hard Times* come from different ends of the social scale. Although Esther turns out to be the love-child of Lady Dedlock, and Sissy hopes her father is still alive, we meet both of them as orphans who have been brought up as social outcasts—Esther because of her illegitimate birth, Sissy as the daughter of a circus clown. They are made to feel their alienation keenly, Esther by an aunt so much of the Murdstone persuasion that she never revealed her blood relationship to the child, and Sissy by her fact-churning, fancy-spurning benefactor, Mr Gradgrind. Yet they are both creatures of warmth and light: “they said that wherever Dame Durden [Esther] went, there was sunshine and summer air” (*Bleak House*, 482); “Sissy, being at the corner of a row [in Thomas Gradgrind's schoolroom] on the sunny side, came in for the beginning of a sunbeam. . . . she seemed to receive a deeper and more lustrous color from the sun when it shone upon her” (*Hard Times*, 49). Similarly, “the Child of the Marshalsea,” Amy Dorrit, is pictured in the original cover design for *Little Dorrit*, and then in the title page of the first edition, standing in a sunbeam at the prison gate.⁵

These young characters, and Lucie Manette, too, are alike both in their absence of self-interest, and in their supportive and life-giving properties. They all become good little housekeepers, in which role they appear more vivid and useful than Florence Dombey, who usually has the services of Susan Nipper; and more down-to-earth than the saintly Agnes Wickfield. Esther is methodical and capable, managing Bleak House's “two bunches of keys” (142) and the teapot with equal dexterity, while Sissy takes on the role of “good fairy” (294) in the Gradgrind home, being both “serviceable” (128) and generally comforting, and giving to the three younger Gradgrind children all the humanity which had been denied to the elder two. Arthur notes approvingly that Amy has made a home for her father even out of his prison lodging; Lucie ministers lovingly to hers after his eighteen years in the Bastille, and later her husband wonders how she can manage all her household duties so well, without appearing to be rushed.

Yet for all the beams that these young characters shed on the world around them, it is a place full of suffering, indeed. Take *Bleak House*. Richard Carstone, an open and cheerful teenager educated at Winchester, has no idea, when first brought to London by Mr Jarndyce, that the vain hope of coming into a fortune will blight his life: "Chancery will work none of its bad influences on us" (108) he tells Ada Clare near the beginning of the long novel; but of course he is wrong. There is little enough nobility in his fitful moral and physical decline, and his early death: this is the sort of misery from which, only a few years ago (in *Dombey and Son*), Dickens had decided to protect Walter Gay. And Ada is left at the end as his very young widow, bringing up their fatherless child. Mr Jarndyce's remark that the universe "makes rather an indifferent parent" (122) for an orphan like Ada, thus turns out to be an understatement. Similarly, at the end of *Hard Times*, Dickens raises and dismisses the hope that Louisa Gradgrind / Bounderby will remarry after her first disastrous match: "Such a thing was never to be" (313).

Even where skies are bluer, there is a new facing of realities. Esther Summerson marries the dedicated young doctor, Allan Woodcourt (whose very name reminds us of David Copperfield's second surname; we notice too that one of Esther's nicknames is "Dame Trot"): his practice in Yorkshire is first described by Mr Jarndyce as "a very, very commonplace affair. . . an appointment to a great amount of work and a small amount of pay." The "better things [that] gather about it" (873) are the result of Mr Jarndyce's kindness, and their own cheerful endeavours. In *Hard Times*, Sissy Jupe's happiness is only mentioned in a passing reference to her children; it is quickly followed by an account of Louisa's new concern for "her humbler fellow-creatures, and. . . their lives of machinery and reality" (313). The ending of *Little Dorrit* is similarly muted. Amy and Arthur Clennam, like Esther and Allan, will lead "a modest life of usefulness and happiness," with Amy still bearing the responsibility of her shallow sister and scapegrace brother—caring for Fanny's "neglected children," and nursing the ungrateful Tip until his own death in the Marshalsea. The sense of embattlement in the last lines has often been noted:

and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted and chafed, and made their usual uproar. (895)

Over the happiness of Dr Manette and the Darnays at the end of *A Tale of Two Cities*, the guillotine on which Sydney Carton dies casts a long shadow.⁶

Two images stay in the mind after reading these novels of the fifties. One is that of the jailer's three- or four-year-old daughter passing food through the bars of the "villainous" prison in Marseilles at the beginning of *Little Dorrit* (40); the other, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, is that of Darnay's pretty child, a second generation Lucie, looking helplessly up at a window of the prison where her own father is confined. To be *outside* these barred windows is something; but although Dickens's child figure has become stronger in itself, its power to build "a Heaven in Hell's despair" is perceived to be limited indeed.

Therefore, the child in these works is more strongly urged than ever to grow up. The proliferation of prematurely aged children, in *Bleak House* especially, has often been noted. There are the Smallweeds, for instance, who have been "going out" early in life for generations, and have never had time for the "fiction and fables" (*Bleak House*, 342) which Dickens knows are so important for nurturing the imagination. This of course is to be deplored. But consider Maggy in *Little Dorrit*, a grown woman with the mental age of ten. This is sad, too. Maggie is one of Dickens's grotesques: innocent and sweet-natured as she is, she is no delightful Clara or Dora or jolly Mr Dick. The idea of actually basking in eternal childishness has already been curtly dismissed in Harold Skimpole, the last man (and one who was trained as a doctor, at that) to make poor Jo "move on". "I never was responsible in my life—I can't be," he says gaily, when reproved by Esther for encouraging Richard in his Chancery hopes. "I'm afraid everyone is obliged to be" (586), replies Esther pointedly, in words which indicate the central preoccupation of this sombre novel, and of Dickens's later work in general.⁷

What society needs, says the author in *Hard Times*, are mature adults who have had the blessings of a full and happy childhood, and who, not having lost touch with them, can "keep with their pure hands a garden in the stony ways of this world" (223). Such a one is the grown-up Sissy Jupe, whose affections and imagination were nurtured by her father. She is still youthful; but there are a few older characters, even in the later Dickens, whose hearts are young. Jarndyce himself is one of the last in the line of philanthropists in the Pickwick and Cheeryble tradition: these are, however, a disappearing race, and some of the novelist's most withering scorn is reserved for the do-gooders in *Bleak House*. The benefactors of *Great Expectations* are to prove particularly disappointing, while Noddy Boffin in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5) is to be more convincing in his feigned corruption than in his unworldly innocence. The implication is, that we must each do our bit—"and it's something in this world, even to do that" as Mrs Blinder, the Neckett children's landlady in *Bleak House* says, "unconsciously fixing Harold Skimpole with her eye" (265).

A number of disadvantaged or deprived children do turn into responsible adults in these sombre fifties' novels. Among the former are Esther's young protégé in *Bleak House*, Caddy Jellyby, and prison-bred Amy Dorrit; among the latter are the unloved Esther, and the long-suffering Arthur Clennam. "False psychology" again? George Eliot's essay on "The Natural History of German Life," in which she makes this criticism of Dickens's "preternaturally virtuous poor children,"⁸ was written in the middle of this period. But these young people are all marked by their early sufferings. Caddy, the victim of her mother's worthy project for Borrioboola-Gha, has bitter struggles with resentment, shame and longing; her dealings with her mother and little brother, Peepy, make her one of Dickens's most realistic young females. Chesterton thought her "by far the greatest, the most human, and the most really dignified of all the heroines."⁹ Amy cannot enjoy her family's new-found freedom and prosperity when it comes, pining only for the old

closeness to her father: the little girl whom Bob, the bachelor turnkey, would take on outings to the countryside and sometimes carry 'home' on his shoulder, will always be "The Child of the Marshalsea." Psycholiterary approaches to her character suggest that Esther Summerson's continual efforts to please, and her constant surprise that she does please, are quite consonant with her loveless upbringing.¹⁰ Nor has Arthur Clennam escaped all those dreary childhood Sabbaths unmarked: ironically, this troubled middle-aged man stands more in need of Amy than she of him. He is the first of Dickens's less than heroic heroes.

Such characters have grown up true and straight under a shadow. They reassure us that experience has not entirely robbed Dickens of his optimism. He still has hope for mankind, and the child in whom Blake's "Diving Image," with its "Mercy, Love, & Pity," is found, is still the very source of his hope.

* * * * *

Not losing touch with that "image," learning to do our bit, to be responsible for ourselves and others—these are surely the central themes of Dickens's next and arguably finest novel, *Great Expectations* (1860–1). Here, using the first-person narrative for only the third time in a full-length work (and Esther only tells half the story of *Bleak House*), he achieves his greatest insight into the working of a child's mind. Judging and analysing as well as remembering, Philip Pirrip relates the story of his betrayal of his own heart, a betrayal which results from his false hopes and pride; he reveals, too, the value of that innocent heart, as well as the satisfaction that comes from learning to be true to it.

We have been told many times how we "must"¹¹ read *Great Expectations*. In particular, its confessional nature has been much dwelt on. Pip does indeed have to struggle hard to deal with his sense of guilt—and no wonder. It is a part of his life from the very start, long before it is augmented by the shame instilled by Estella and her superficial refinement, and (more insidiously) by his own shortcomings. It has been laid on him from birth by his rigid, rampaging elder sister, and a society which respects her sacrifice and feels no sympathy for the object of it. Thus we find him begging forgiveness near the beginning, for ever having been a "poor little child"¹² who needed to be taken in by Joe Gargery when he married her. The only one of six brothers to have survived infancy, he has led years (about seven years, it seems) of "penetential performances" for it—"punishments, disgraces, fasts and vigils" (92)—even before we meet him.

There is much to mark out the Pip of these early chapters as the quintessential Dickens child victim; we might even say the quintessential child of his times, on whose behalf the novelist campaigned. Far from being "pompeyed" (73—his sister's word for pampered), he is "repulsed... at every turn" (46), and regularly "tickled" with a "wax-ended piece of cane" (40) quite worn with use. We also find him being beaten around the head with a thimble, until his scalp tingles. He is set to work not only in Joe's forge, but also at frightening birds, picking up stones and so on, for neighbours: whatever he earns is taken away from him. In the home, we see him made to stir the Christmas pudding for

an hour at a time, and, like Squeers's boys, he is dosed with purgative, his head being held under Mrs Joe's arm "as a boot would be held in a boot-jack" (44). At the end of each day, darkness descends on this child as it does on Oliver and David in the earlier novels, for he is not allowed a candle at bed-time. Sundays are as miserable for him as they were for Arthur Clennam, and in company he is the butt of that constant putting down which seems to have been the lot of the Victorian child. "Naterally wicious" (57) snaps Mr Hubble, in support of Mrs Joe—expressing, on Christmas Day of all days, the very same opinion about children as that held by the Murdstones. This "perpetual conflict with injustice" (92) in his upbringing breeds more than guilt: it raises a deep sense of grievance in Pip's soul, which is naturally focused on his sister.

As Philip realizes now, even if his younger self had done nothing at all to feel guilty about, he would have felt himself "in a false position" (56) in that Christmas gathering. But (unlike Esther Summerson, who was brought up with similar reluctance, and feels "guilty and yet innocent" [*Bleak House*, 65]), by this time he has embarked on the course of events which leads him to accept that he really *is* guilty. Under compulsion, he has stolen from his sister's pantry and from Joe's forge, to help the escaped convict. This fearful apparition had addressed "the small bundle of shivers" in Chapter 1 as a "little devil" (36), and Pip, once he was forced into such subterfuges as hiding bread and butter down his trouser leg, had begun to feel like one, assailed by his conscience and his "guilty knowledge" (44). When his extraordinary visit to Miss Havisham induces him to tell romanticized nonsense to Joe, and his resented sister is savagely assaulted by the very leg-iron which that convict filed off, his fears seem to be confirmed. The sudden good fortune which sends him off to London is an "emancipation" (173) not only from the rigours of his childhood but also from the murmurs of his conscience—which, however, is not so easily silenced.

As Chesterton says, *Great Expectations* could have been the title of any of Dickens's novels: it was the book he was always writing, from *Oliver Twist* onwards; not because (Chesterton's words) it is "full of an airy and yet ardent expectation of everything,"¹³ but because it is about youth on the road, with the devil dogging it.

The devil has appeared in many guises in Dickens now: in the great villains of the earlier novels, Fagin and Sikes, Ralph Nickleby and Quilp; in the ogres along David's route to Dover; and even in Barnaby's raven:

He calls me, and makes me go where he will. He goes on before, and

I follow. He's the master, and I'm the man. Isn't that the truth, Grip?¹⁴

It has appeared in the mercenary (*Dombey and Son*) and the mean and fraudulent (*Martin Chuzzlewit*); in the menacing conglomerates of society, like the law (Chancery, which gorges itself on an innocent boy like Rick Carstone) and bureaucracy (the Circumlocution Office, his dealings with which bring Old Dorrit into the Marshalsea); and in those fearsome Victorian -isms (like Mrs Clennam's Sabbatarianism) which dry up the human heart. In *David Copperfield*, for the first time, it started to get inside the hero, who squirmed with guilt for a while as if he had been "a most atrocious criminal" (108). And where it remained outside, it could be attractive and subtle (like Steerforth) as well as

slimy and disgusting (like Uriah): the devil did not need to be old any more.

The devil in *Great Expectations* is, again, both inside and out. But this time it is more inside than out, so much so that its outer manifestations are easily recognized to be aspects of the hero himself. Joe's resentful journeyman, Orlick, is the real culprit in the matter of Mrs Joe's assault; the equally brutish Bentley Drummle is the man whom Estella carelessly marries to complete Miss Havisham's revenge on mankind for her own aborted wedding day. But Pip's well-established resentment of his sister, and his unintentional and round-about provision of a weapon, align him with the former: Orlick is actually made to say, "It was you as did for your shrew sister" (437); he descends to the level of Drummle when he sees Joe through his eyes, something which the narrator, the older Philip, later judges to be one of his "worst weaknesses and meannesses" (240). The "black ingratitude" (134) of his shame of home, his embarrassment at being seen with the good-natured fellow-sufferer of his childhood, is felt most keenly here. We do not need to choose between these two for Pip's alter ego, or, more accurately, his worse half: "Drummle is a reduplication of Orlick at a point higher on the social-economic scale"¹⁵; the difference between the two approximates to the rise in Pip's own fortunes.

The fact is, though, that the devil does not get the better of Pip any more than it does of earlier heroes and heroines. Forster suggested the reason long ago: "What a deal of spoiling nevertheless, *a nature that is really good at the bottom of it* will stand without permanent damage"¹⁶(emphasis added). The correlative for Pip's feeling of guilt is surely there in the text, and the reason some commentators sense a discrepancy—C. Robert Stange, for instance, finds "something excessive"¹⁷ here—lies not in the guilt itself, but in their recognition of Pip's fundamentally innocent heart: in other words, they—we—know all along that he is not really as bad as circumstances make him feel he is.

Q. D. Leavis has noted Pip's "natural human sympathy for a wretched creature" at the beginning, a sympathy which is "reinforced by good Joe's expression of similar feelings"; Barbara Hardy has analysed the scene in which Magwitch gulps down the purloined "wittles" (51) in front of Pip, in order to show "[t]he child's civility and pity.... love, generosity."¹⁸ Under the sway of such feelings, Pip is neither intimidated nor repelled by the man's desperate appetite. The convict for his part is moved and softened by the child's concern. Pip's is, perhaps, the first kindness he ever known, for even as a child, he explains to Pip much later, "There warn't a soul to see young Abel Magwitch, with as little on him as in him, but wot caught fright at him, and either drove him off, or took him up" (361). It is Magwitch's gratitude for Pip's kindness that inspires his scheme to raise the boy to be a gentleman.

Pip's pure, child's sympathy is seen again later that day—it is, significantly enough, Christmas Day—when the soldiers gather round the roaring forge, waiting for Joe to repair the handcuffs. The high-spirited men are fired with enthusiasm for the chase, but Pip does not catch their excitement. His mood is more in tune with "the pale afternoon outside, [which] almost seemed in my pitying young fancy to have turned pale on their account, poor wretches" (64). But it is the sympathy which he has already shown to the convict early that morning, that sets the plot in motion, and introduces the theme. It is a

theme which has perhaps more of the resonance of Dickens's "practical humanist kind of Christianity"¹⁹ than that of any of the other full-length works.

The convict's experience in *Great Expectations* is the blessed one which the prostitute in *Little Dorrit* seeks, when she mistakes Amy for a child in the dark streets: "Kiss a poor lost creature, dear." Amy would gladly have done so, but the woman shrinks away when she sees her face—"You can't do it. . . . You are kind and innocent; but you can't look at me out of a child's eyes"—and hurries away "with a strange, wild, cry" (218). As an adult, Amy cannot help seeing such a woman for what she is—she cannot give the other woman an assurance of her humanity. But this is exactly what Pip can and does do; this is the service he performs for Magwitch, and it is this which redeems the convict from his degraded condition. He recalls it "many a time" (337) in his rough, solitary toils after being transported; before his trial he recalls it again, on the occasions when his "desperate reputation" (465) is alluded to; and in the end, he will recall his own "dear [but for some time erring] Boy" to it.

Pip is not even as much of a hero as his immediate predecessors in Dickens: he wastes no time seeking to right some unknown wrong, like Arthur Clennam, or risking death for a misjudged servant like Charles Darnay, or looking for a chance to martyr himself for his loved one like Sydney Carton. He does try to save two lives, but neither is that of some beautiful heroine like Madeline Bray, whom Nicholas Nickleby dashingly rescues from an unsuitable match. There are fairy-tale elements in the story of Miss Havisham's beautiful ward, Estella, but Pip's efforts are on behalf of the eccentric old woman herself—the witch, if you like—and that most disappointing of fairy godfathers, *Magwitch*. In neither case is Pip successful. Considering his disappointment, and the fact that he has been reluctant even to be seen with Joe in London, Pip's greatest achievement is to hold Magwitch's hand in the dock, and allow himself to be pointed at by "a large theatrical audience" (466) in the courtroom. Then he, who had once shrunk from the very sight of the Debtors' Gate, begins his vigils at the condemned man's prison infirmary death-bed. Pip's tenderness and compassion here are so great that they seem to bathe everyone around with their light, not only the prison governor who lets him overstay his time, but even the very prisoners who work in the infirmary: "malefactors, but not incapable of kindness, GOD be thanked!" (468). The illumination of the grim context and coarse criminal by the eyes of love, and Magwitch's own gratitude for it and stoicism in the grip of evident pain, make this the unlikely apotheosis of all Dickens's death-bed scenes. It is, significantly, not one in which a child dies, but one in which a youth comforts a man to whom he has restored humanity.²⁰

Pip does, indeed, become as a child again. After the convict's death, he collapses, and Joe comes to nurse him: "I fancied I was little Pip again. . . . I was like a child in his hands" (476), the older Philip remembers. The scales fall from his eyes, and he appreciates anew the honest worth, the truly gentlemanly qualities, of his blacksmith brother-in-law. When he first comes to consciousness, he whispers "penitently . . . 'O God bless him! O God bless this gentle Christian man!'" (472). Q. D. Leavis finds this awkward, carrying the implication that Joe is "neither a gentleman nor even a wholly satisfactory practical

character"²¹ ; but, much more probably, it suggests that he is both. It even has a ring of Christmas about it, which takes us back to that Christmas Day when the two were bound together in compassion for the convicts, and wished for them to be saved. Pip's recovery is a spiritual as well as a physical one.

It is true that the old relationship cannot be sustained as Pip grows stronger. And this is the point at which Q. D. Leavis believes that Dickens finally discards the old Romantic image of the child. But Joe's "great nature" (476) has all along been the touchstone by which the older narrator has judged Pip; and this is his finest hour. In no sense is he rejected: but Pip has grown up, and he must find his own way forward. His innocence now cannot actually be that of a child, any more than Amy Dorrit's can; it is an innocence which has assimilated and transcended experience, the "organized" innocence of Blake rather than the naive innocence of the Wordsworthian child. Far from being left behind, the romantic child is brought forward into adult life.

It may be, as Martin Meisil has suggested, that the new little Pip at the end of the novel, Joe and Biddy's child, symbolically completes Pip's own rebirth.²² But this is perhaps as much a part of the tidying up as the meeting with Estella. The important thing is that Pip assumes his adult responsibilities after the catastrophes he has been involved in. His gradual rise to be a partner in the sound, reputable merchant business which Wemmick had originally brought to his attention, and into which Pip had secretly articed Herbert Pocket, is the modest triumph which he achieves. That this should testify to his restoration to his better nature is part of Dickens's well-laid plan: his own note for the conclusion refers to it as "The one good thing he did in his prosperity, the only thing that endures and bears good fruit."²³ No one can accuse Dickens of having thrown a false glow of optimism over Pip's situation at the end, whether or not he manages to fulfil his boyhood aspirations and marry Estella. Dickens himself wrote to Forster, "the general turn and tone of the working out and winding up, will be away from all such things as they conventionally go. But what must be, must be " (Forster 2: 288). Yet Pip is by no means the "defeated hero"²⁴ of Philip Hobsbaum's description. There is certainly nothing shaky in his prospects: "We were not in a grand way of business, but we had a good name, and worked for our profits, and did very well" (489).

A subtle commentary on Pip's story is provided by that of Estella, who has been brought up by Miss Havisham not to have a heart—to "have no softness there, no—sympathy—sentiment—nonsense" (259). She too has to find a humanity which she has (though through no fault of her own) been led away from. Her case also bears some resemblance to Louisa Gradgrind's. However, either with the Shropshire doctor, or with a chastened, worthy Pip, Dickens allows her to find a loving husband after all.

There is much in Pip's and Estella's lives, as well as in Magwitch's, to offset the implication of natural depravity presented by that odious trio, Orlick, Drummle and the shadowy, unregenerate Compeyson— who had "no more a heart, than a iron file" (362). Compeyson, who wrecked Miss Havisham's life by leading her on and jilting her, who master-minded the crimes which landed Magwitch in court, and who is finally responsible for Magwitch's recapture, might seem to occupy the place in the schematics of the

novel which monsters like Quilp occupied in the earlier novels. But what gusto there is in the description of evil here all goes into Orlick, whose attack on Mrs Joe is so intimately linked with the younger Pip's resentment and duplicity. Thus, what Osbert Sitwell once described as the "Virtue *v.* Vice Cup-Tie Final" in this work occurs more inside the character than ever before. And the early glimpses we catch of the child Pip's good nature are our best guarantee that "good will triumph after a hotly-disputed match."²⁵

* * * * *

There is one more child death-bed scene to come in the novels²⁶; but in Dickens's last works, too, his more central young characters neither sink into death nor into the mire of evil, but go forward into the future. If it is a future divested of its old sentimental aura, so much the more laudable for them, and convincing for us.

The child who dies is little Johnnie, Betty Higden's great-grandchild in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5), the last member of her family left to her. His death is part of Dickens's renewed bitter attack on the Poor Law, being offered as one of those "shameful cases of disease and death from destitution that shock the Public and disgrace the country".²⁷ Fearful of the humiliations to which the Law subjects the needy, Mrs Higden has tried to nurse the child through his fever by herself. When he is finally taken to the Children's Hospital through the good offices of Mrs Boffin, it is too late. Having signified his desire for toys to be bestowed on the tot in the next bed, and sent a kiss to the "boofer lady" (Bella Wilfer), Johnnie dies under the compassionate eyes of the doctor, and John Rokesmith/Harmon. It is a touching little scene, the more so for its brevity and restraint, and it reflects both Dickens's continued commitment to the children's cause, and the continued need for it—over thirty years after the Poor Law Amendment Act which had so incensed him that he inveighed against it in *Oliver Twist*.

What the two unattractive children of this last completed novel show is not Dickens's disenchantment with the child as a repository of God-given sensibilities and a reservoir of possibilities, but this same abiding and profound concern that society should not allow these attributes to be crushed, but should exert itself to draw them out. Charley Hexam is about fifteen at the beginning of the narrative. He is stunted and half-civilized, hard-hearted and rude to the very sister who has selflessly and—unlike Mrs Joe—uncomplainingly brought him up. We are told that "[i]t was his better nature to be true to her," and that "as yet the better nature had the stronger hold" (266), but his desperate struggle for an education, and his aspirations to be respectable, threaten to swamp whatever is good in him. Is he not another version of Pip, whose exertions at Mr Wopsle's great aunt's institution first produce in him a feeling of "modest patronage" (*Great Expectations*, 76) over the unlettered blacksmith? Dickens's special concern here, as Philip Collins has shown, is with the kind of education open to such children—the Ragged Schools. These are what he has grown more and more disenchanted with, not the children themselves:

The school at which young Charley Hexam had first learned from a

book... was a miserable loft in an unsavoury yard. Its atmosphere was oppressive and disagreeable; it was crowded, noisy, and confusing; half the pupils dropped asleep, or fell into a state of waking stupefaction; the other half kept them in either condition by maintaining a monotonous droning noise. . . The teachers, animated solely by good intentions, had no idea of execution, and a lamentable jumble was the upshot of their kind endeavours.(263)

Bradley Headstone, the schoolmaster who struggles between the untamed passions of a Heathcliff, and a frantic concern to keep face (for he was a pauper boy himself once) is an example of what sort of violence can be done to human nature when the education of the *whole* man is incomplete. Henry James, in his complaint that Headstone is a melodramatic figure rather than a fully realized character,²⁸ has perhaps missed the point here—what Dickens wants to show is that such a man never *can* be a fully realized character. Charley himself steadily loses touch with his better nature as the narrative progresses, sacrificing his attachment to his sister as well as to his old schoolmaster in order to keep his own precarious hold on his “prospects” (781).

Still more physically stunted than Charley is Jenny Wren, the doll’s dressmaker who supports her alcoholic father as if he were her child. She is about twelve or thirteen when we first meet her, but talks bitterly of other healthy children who make fun of her. Appearances to the contrary, she is not one of John Carey’s “dwarfs” (this critic’s term, in *The Violent Effigy*, for Dickens’s unchildlike child characters). She has a sharp tongue and sharp gestures to go with her sharp needle, and puts pepper on Fascination Fledgeby’s smarts after his well-deserved beating. In fact, her outlook is generally ‘peppery,’ except when she is imagining her release from her twisted and pain-wracked body into peaceful death. Her real name, Fanny Cleaver, is indicative of her cutting edge. She is, however, fundamentally a good-hearted girl, devoted both to her father and to Charley’s sister, Lizzie. Her deformity and the shrewish part of her character can be—are—put down to her poor upbringing, and to those “fine ladies” who are so “inconsiderate” (273) as to exploit the likes of her instead of trying to alleviate their sufferings. And there are signs at the end (in the form of Sloppy’s attentions to her) that her tendencies both to morbidity and acerbity are to be happily corrected.

In Lizzie Hexam we see one of those special young people who have managed to survive a disadvantaged childhood without being in any way warped by it. A “female waterman, turned factory girl” (889), as Lady Tippins scornfully describes her, she differs from her brother in refusing to “be persuaded into being respectable” (113), and certainly does not equate respectability with happiness. A self-sacrificing heroine of the type inspired by Dickens’s memory of the young sister-in-law, who never ceased to represent his ideal of the female (see Forster 2: 402), Lizzie finds her happiness in attending to her father, to which end she forgoes or at least postpones her own education. This girl, who “scarcely looks or speaks like an ignorant person” (281), amply demonstrates that Dickens has not lost faith in the potential of innocent youth. Indeed, when we first see her, with her “face... very pale,” and her tendency to “turn very faint” (45) as she rows for

her father on the murky river, she takes us right back to *Oliver Twist* again; as first seen at night by Eugene Wrayburn, too, through the window of her poor riverside home, she presents just such a “sad and solitary spectacle” (211) as Oliver does under Fagin’s custody. However, Lizzie is not only older than Oliver (about the same age as Bella Wilfer, who is nineteen), but she has the strength of a dozen Olivers, as her rescue of Eugene reveals. On this occasion, she evinces the same kind of superhuman power as Maggie does at the end of *The Mill on the Floss*, with the important differences that her object is to save her sweetheart, not her brother, and that she attains it. She is not an insipid character at all: something of her vitality is suggested from the beginning, by her flushed cheek and “the shining lustre of her hair” (211) as she sits alone weeping by her fire. And when we leave her, she is as much a prop to her physically injured but morally reclaimed husband, as Jane Eyre is to Rochester.

As often as Lizzie is unfairly criticized as improbable (though Norman Page is one of those who have spoken up for her²⁹), the other young heroine of *Our Mutual Friend*, Bella Wilfer, is praised for being just that mixture of grace and wilfulness which her name suggests. We are never allowed to forget that her laying into her father with her bonnet, when she was a very small child indeed, was what drew old Mr Harmon’s attention to her in the first place, and produced the major romantic complication of the plot. At nineteen, she is still part youthful high spirits, part spoilt child, impatient with the makeshifts of genteel poverty. Her head is as easily turned when the Boffins take her up, as Pip’s is when he thinks he is Miss Havisham’s protégé. But thanks to the strategy of Mr Boffin in pretending to become mercenary, as well as to the promptings of her own conscience, it is her finer qualities that win through. Again, the path she treads, which brings her back to her own best self, is similar to Pip’s. The happy ending for Bella and John lies less in their grand house with its *Arabian Nights* atmosphere, than in her “dearly natural” (880) ways which it rewards.

Like Jenny Wren, Bella treats her much-loved father as if he is a child, at one time subjecting him to almost as abrasive a cleaning-up operation as the one Mrs Joe inflicts on Pip before his first visit to Miss Havisham:

Bella soaped his face and rubbed his face, and soaped his hands and rubbed his hands, and splashed him and rinsed him and towelled him, until he was as red as beet-root, even to his very ears: “Now you must be brushed and combed, sir. . . . Shut your eyes, sir, and let me take hold of your chin. Be good directly, and do as you are told!”
(752)

This is partly “Holiday Romance” whimsy; but it has a more serious undertone. The Dickens child has gathered strength indeed, and can take a strong hand with the ineffectual parent at last. From Bella’s charmingly playful manipulations of her own little baby-Bella, it is clear that the children of the next generation are in no danger of either inadequate parental guidance, or the kind of “blighted childhood” (233) her husband endured. And here, by the way, is an “inexhaustible” (837) infant to compensate for the little Johnnie who died much earlier in the narrative.

* * * * *

That the last child in Dickens's *oeuvre* should be quite so repugnant as Deputy, in the unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), is unfortunate. But this young hooligan who throws stones at Stony Durdles is only a confirmation of Dickens's now long-established dismissal of the nobility of the savage—Durdles explains that he is “own brother to Peter the Wild Boy!”³⁰ The “Baby-Devil” (72) here is in much the same state as the hero at the beginning of that curious recent short story, “George Silverman’s Explanation” (1868), who is addressed as a devil by his poverty-stricken mother, and later compares himself to a wolf-cub or vampire. Deputy is another warning to society which neglects the offspring of the poorest of the poor, the denizens of the cellars and streets, or tries to reclaim them when the damage has already been done. In this case, Durdles pays Deputy to throw stones at him whenever he is late, in order to give an outlet to his aggression and save him from further brushes with the law. But it is too much to hope that any good will come of the masochistic scheme: our last encounter with Deputy shows him fully expecting to be “in the Lock-up” (276) again.

Nevertheless, even in this novel, where evil looms so large, there is no slackening of Dickens’s profound interest in the effects of early experience on later life, nor of his related concern with the process by which the child crosses the threshold into the adult world. Quite the reverse, in fact. What he wrote to Forster shows that the novel grew from his idea of tracing how “Two people, *boy and girl, or very young*” part, and come to deal with their pledge to be married in the future (Forster 2:365; emphasis added).

The four young people on whom the plot centres are indeed hardly more than children: Rosebud is in her last year as “pet pupil” (153) at Miss Twinkleton’s seminary, and gets too sticky eating ‘Lumps-of-Delight’ to be kissed by her intended; Helen and Neville Landless are just commencing their formal education at the seminary and at Minor Canon Corner respectively. Authorial forbearance seems guaranteed by the fact that, like Edwin (to whom Rosebud has been betrothed since her seventh year), all three have been orphans from an early age. The Landless twins have shared a “wretched existence” (88) as younger children, with a brutish, tyrannical stepfather, and marks of his deprivation are clearly visible on Neville: he himself realizes it has “caused me to be utterly wanting in I don’t know what emotions, or remembrances, or good instincts—I have not even a name for the thing, you see!” (90). Rosebud, pitied at the Nuns’ House for her lack of family, bears rather different marks upon her, for she has “grown to be an amiable, giddy, wilful, winning little creature” (106) with a vitality and capacity for affection which make her one of Dickens’s most promising female leads. Alas, we shall never know where this promise was meant to take her.

* * * * *

Whatever disappointments Dickens had with his own children, who on the whole suited him better when they were still young and responsive to his own ever-youthful

enthusiasm,³¹ he neither lost touch with youth nor became soured with it. It remained, for him, "the purest part of our lives,"³² which would help in our ultimate salvation. From first to last, he urged society and the family to take their responsibility to the young as a sacred burden: "O don't talk of duty as a child, Miss Summerson," says Caddy: "where's Ma's duty as a parent?" (*Bleak House*, 96). As for the children themselves, they do have responsibilities, not to obey their parents blindly—so many of Dickens's child characters are orphans, and those that are not almost invariably have bad parents—but to be true to the good in their own hearts, a good which is unmixed in the early characters, but not always so in the later ones. Once they do that, there is hope not only for themselves, but for society as a whole. For, to turn around what Hillis Miller says at the end of his *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels*, "To take responsibility for making the self is to take responsibility for making the world."

It may be that Dickens, looking inside himself, gradually comes to realize his own inadequacies as the child of parents on whom he had, hitherto, placed all the blame for his own early sufferings. This would help explain how the unalloyed pity for an outcast orphan like Oliver gives way to a conscience-stricken awareness of selfishness in Pip, and also in Bella Wilfer; why tenderness towards such false or disappointing fathers or father-figures as Mr Dombey and Magwitch comes to be such a significant marker of moral worth; and why later young people like Jenny Wren and Bella take their inadequate fathers so firmly in hand.³³ What is more significant, though, is that the child should emerge as a figure *capable* of bearing this kind of responsibility, and not collapsing under it—as Forster (unfortunately) encouraged Dickens to let Little Nell collapse.

Perhaps we can call Dickens's more vigorous child characters a result of his own successful bridging of a certain gap in himself between the overwhelmed child and the energetic, determined man (see Forster 1:34–5). Or, we may find in them a happy reconciliation of his romantic instinct with Victorian realism.³⁴ That this realism hardly ever runs to a recognition of burgeoning sexuality is, perhaps, a limitation of the age rather than simply Dickens's: after all, even sexual maturity tends to be lost in the sibling loves and stagey passions of Victorian writing. That his realism is apt to peter out into a domesticity which the modern reader may find suffocating, is another important reservation to be made, especially when we think of his young housekeeping heroines. The only escape from these two evasions would seem to be in the story of Emily, and the original ending of *Great Expectations*. The former is quite melodramatic, and the latter he was easily prevailed upon to change. When he did change it, it was to serve up a familiar scenario: a semi-incestuous attachment (after all, Pip is almost as much Magwitch's child as Estella is), merging into the cosy intimacy of marriage.

A child of his times, then, finally? Yes, but Dickens is much more than that, too. As the creator of so many successful young heroes, heroines and supporting characters, he advances the position of the most underprivileged and overburdened sector of his society, not simply by drawing attention to its urgent needs, but, still more effectively, by pushing it forward into an active participation in life. The whole trend of his writing

about children is summed up best in "Tom Tiddler's Ground," his Christmas story for 1861, the year in which *Great Expectations* was completed. Here, in contrast to Mr Mopes the Hermit, who stays anxiously looking out of his barred window, little Kitty Kimmeens emerges from her "unnatural solitude" in the deserted school-house, in order to "look abroad for wholesome sympathy, to bestow and to receive." This is in accordance with Mr Traveller's belief that Eternal Providence expects us to "arise and wash our faces and do our gregarious work and act and re-act on one another."³⁵ Echoing Blake's sentiment, "Neither Youth nor Childhood is Folly or Incapacity,"³⁶ Dickens repeatedly asserts the positive contributions that both can make to the quality of adult life. In the courage and triumphs of David, Pip, Esther, Caddy and their likes, we have the best reason for refusing to weep over the more feeble of Dickens's fictional children.

NOTES

1. *Bleak House*, ed. Norman Page (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 199. Subsequent references to this edition are given parenthetically in the text.
2. Title of Michael Slater's contribution on *The Chimes* in *Dickens 1970: Centenary Essays*, by Walter Allen et al., ed. Michael Slater (London: Chapman & Hall, 1970), 227.
3. *Hard Times*, ed. David Craig (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 290. Subsequent references to this edition are given parenthetically in the text.
4. ed. John Holloway (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 787. Subsequent references to this edition are given parenthetically in the text.
5. See John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 225.
6. It is hard enough to believe in Manette's complete recovery. See also Philip Hobsbaum, *A Reader's Guide to Charles Dickens* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 220.
7. E.g., see Monroe Engel on Esther's "schematic place" in the novel, "*Bleak House*," reprinted in *Dickens: Modern Judgements*, ed. A.E.Dyson (London: Macmillan, 1968), 202.
8. *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), 271.
9. G.K.Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (New York: Haskell House, 1970), 157.
10. See Philip Collins's comments on recent work on her in *Victorian Literature: A Second Guide to Research* (New York: MLA, 1978), 98. For a fine appreciation of Esther's positive though circumscribed qualities, see J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), 221ff. On her unattractive virtue, see W.J. Harvey's "*Bleak House*," reprinted in *Dickens: Modern Judgements*, 208.
11. See Q.D.Leavis's heading for her chapter on the novel in *Dickens the Novelist* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).
12. *Great Expectations*, ed. Angus Calder (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 78. Subsequent references to this edition are given parenthetically in the text.
13. Chesterton, 200.
14. *Barnaby Rudge*, ed. Gordon Spence (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 99.
15. Julian Moynahan, "The Hero's Guilt—The Case of *Great Expectations*," reprinted in *Hard Times, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend: A Casebook*, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1979), 113.
16. *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 2 vols (London: Dent, 1927), 2:285. Subsequent references to this edition are made parenthetically in the text.

17. "Expectations Well Lost: Dickens's Fable for His Time," reprinted in *The Nineteenth Century Novel: Critical Essays and Documents* (London: Heinemann, 1972), 139.
18. Leavis, *Dickens the Novelist*, 381; Hardy, *The Moral Art of Dickens*, (London: Athlone Press, 1970), 143.
19. Humphrey House, *The Dickens World* (London: Oxford Univ.Press, paperback ed. 1960),131.
20. For a more sentimental death-bed scene in which a *child* expresses forgiveness to a dying man (this time, though unknown to him, his real father), see "Mrs Lirriper's Legacy" (1864), *Christmas Stories* (London: Oxford Univ.Press, 1956), 426–7. These short piece are generally more sentimental: the younger Jemmy has several chances to exercise his childish lisp.
21. See *Dickens the Novelist*, 422
22. See "The Problem of the Novel's Ending," reprinted in *Hard Times, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend: A Casebook*, 126ff. Certainly, rebirth is an important theme in the later novels. The most obvious example is the birth of infant namesake of Sidney Carton to the Darnays.
23. Reprinted in Butt and Tillotson,30.
24. Hobsbaum (see n.6 above), 242
25. *Dickens* (originally published, 1932; New York: Haskell House, 1973),39.
26. N. B. Little Sophy Marigold dies in the Christmas story of 1865, "Doctor Marigold," to be, in a sense, reborn to the Doctor's adopted deaf-and-dumb child (also called Sophy).
27. Dickens's own Postscript to the novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 894. Subsequent references to this edition are given parenthetically in the text.
28. See his review of the novel, reprinted in *The Critical Heritage*, 472. For Collins's illuminating and sympathetic treatment of Headstone as a schoolmaster, see his *Dickens and Education* (London: Macmillan,1963), 159ff.
29. Page shows her growth of moral stature through a close analysis of her speeches—"The Problem of Speech" in *Hard Times, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend: A Casebook*, 195 ff.
30. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, ed. Arthur J. Cox (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 72. Subsequent references to this edition are given parenthetically in the text. See Dickens's diatribe against the concept of the noble savage in "The Noble Savage," *The Uncommercial Traveller and Reprinted Pieces, etc.*, (London: Oxford Univ. Press,1958), 467ff.
31. See Arthur A. Adrian, *Dickens and the Parent-Child Relationship* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1984), on Dickens's failure to "grow up" with his own children, 56ff.
32. "The Wreck of the Golden Mary" (in collaboration with Wilkie Collins, 1856), *Christmas Stories*, 154.
33. Dorothy Van Ghent, in her seminal essay on *Great Expectations*, has commented memorably on this centrality of the father-child relationship in Dickens. See *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1953), 137.
34. See Donald D. Stone's chapter on Dickens in *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980)
35. *Christmas Stories*, 310, 300.
36. Letter to Dr Trussler, *The Letters of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1956), 36.

(Received September 1, 1991)